

To Whom it may Concern:

I am the Human Trafficking Liaison for the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office. I'm writing to encourage you to vote in support of HB 461.

In 2016 the task force to which I am assigned, rescued a 17 year old female from drug traffickers who were also trafficking her for sex. During her forensic interview she disclosed horrific childhood abuse and sexual advances from a step father. She ran away from home to escape the situation multiple times, and subsequently was involved in misdemeanor type activity and drug use.

She told her story at a Child Advocacy Center in Dayton. As a complex trauma survivor it took tremendous effort to get her to trust clinicians enough to open up. She did not want to disclose any "force, fraud or coercion" against her traffickers because she considered them her "friends." (This is very common with victims, especially minors.)

At the end of the a very long traumatic day, instead of being taken to a safe place where she could receive PTSD treatment, this sex trafficking victim was escorted from this safe haven for abused children in SHACKLES, both leg and arm shackles!

Why? Because she had misdemeanor charges which "took precedence" over any concern about her being trafficked. This severely traumatized 17 year old female was put into juvenile detention. I asked the judge to place her in a treatment facility, but he said he could not do it because the charges were out of his county. (She did eventually get services because we kept insisting on it, and opened up about the trafficking, the case was prosecuted.)

The field of human trafficking is fairly new in the social sciences. In Ohio, research is less than 10 years old. And yet, we know much more today than we knew even five years ago about child sex trafficking.

We know for instance, that runaway youth are more likely to be exploited for sex and labor than their peers. We also know that runaways are more likely to experience certain dysfunctional family situations (child molestation/rape, drug addicted parent, abuse, etc). Often, their pasts make them resistant to working with law enforcement.

And we also know that since the age of consent is 16, typically a victim will be asked once about force fraud and coercion, and if he/she denies it, the case is dropped. Unfortunately I hear things like "she is old enough to know better" all the time. Teen victims (16 and 17) are often seen as voluntary prostitutes. Think about that for a minute. How many teens wake up one day and think, I want to be a prostitute? I submit, very very few, if any. There is always a "story" behind how they end up being sold for sex.

This is a loophole easily exploited by traffickers. They target this demographic because they are easy and cheap to force, fraud and coerce.

I'm asking for you to vote this out of committee, and then to advocate for this demographic and get this bill passed.

There isn't a single good reason to leave this loophole open. And shame on Ohio for not having this done already.

Best,

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